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DEFECT ENERGY**

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THE DISTANCE FUNCTION AND DEFECT ENERGY

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is important to measure the energy of jump discontinuities of a unit length gradient field $\nabla\varphi$ in a bounded Lipschitz domain in $\mathbb{R}^n$.

Such problems arise in the modelling of smectic liquid crystals [SK], [AG1] or of the blistering of thin films [OG]. The quantity measuring the energy of the jump discontinuities, the defect of $\nabla\varphi$, is

$$J^\beta(\varphi) = \int_{\Sigma} |\nabla\varphi^+ - \nabla\varphi^-|^\beta d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}$$

where $\beta > 0$; we call it a defect energy. Here Σ is the set of jump discontinuities of $\nabla\varphi$ and $\nabla\varphi^\pm$ is the trace of $\nabla\varphi$ of each side of Σ ; $\mathcal{H}^{n-1}$ is the $n - 1$ dimensional Hausdorff measure which is the surface element when Σ is smooth.

There may be a lot of Lipschitz solutions of the eikonal equation

$$|\nabla\varphi| = 1 \quad \text{in } \Omega \quad \text{with } \varphi = 0 \quad \text{on } \partial\Omega,$$

but the distance function

$$d = d(x, \partial\Omega) = \inf\{|x - y|; y \in \partial\Omega\}$$

is the unique viscosity solution of the problem [CIL]. In other words the theory of viscosity solutions selects a solution of the eikonal equation. There is a fundamental question whether the distance function minimizes J^β among all *nonnegative* solutions of the eikonal equation.

If the space dimension n equals one, J^β just measures a constant multiple of the number of jumps of $\nabla\varphi$. There is no solution of the eikonal equation having no defect satisfying the zero boundary condition. Thus, the distance function is a (unique) minimizer of J^β since it has only one jump of the derivative of φ . However, for multidimensional case, the situation is different.

In this paper, we focus on the case $\beta = 1$ because of independent interest related to the total variation of the Hessian

$$I(\varphi) = \int_{\Omega} |\nabla^2\varphi|.$$

This integral is closely related to J^1 . Indeed, if φ is piecewise linear, more precisely, $\nabla^2\varphi = 0$ (as a measure) outside Σ , then

$$I(\varphi) = \int_{\Sigma} |\nabla^2\varphi| = \int_{\Sigma} |\nabla^+\varphi \cdot \nu - \nabla\varphi^- \cdot \nu| d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}$$

where ν is the approximate normal of Σ [G]. Since the tangential component of $\nabla\varphi$ is approximately continuous, $|\nabla\varphi^+ \cdot \nu - \nabla\varphi^- \cdot \nu| = |\nabla\varphi^+ - \nabla\varphi^-|$ if $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$. Thus, $I(\varphi) = J^1(\varphi)$ for piecewise linear φ . Our principal results are

- (i) the distance function is the unique minimizer of $I(\varphi)$ among all nonnegative (Lipschitz) solutions of the eikonal equation $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$ in Ω with $\varphi = 0$ on $\partial\Omega$ provided that Ω is convex and $n = 2$. The values of minimum equals $\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$.

- (ii) there is a simply connected nonconvex domain Ω in $\mathbb{R}^2$ such that the distance function is not a minimizer of J^1 nor I .

This suggests that the selection mechanism of the ground state by I or J^1 is different from that in the theory of viscosity solutions, in general.

To show (i) we first observe that

$$|\Delta\varphi| = |\nabla^2\varphi|$$

as measures if φ solves $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$ and $n = 2$. This depends on the fact that $\nabla^2\varphi$ has rank one which is easy to observe heuristically. Differentiating $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$ implies that one of eigenvalues of $\nabla^2\varphi$ always equal zero. To carry out this idea we appeal to the theory of functions of bounded variation [G]. Note that the singular part (w.r.t. the Lebesgue measure) of $\nabla^2\varphi$ always has rank one [Al], [AG2]. Another key observation is

$$\int_{\Omega} |\Delta\varphi| \geq \int_{\Omega} -\Delta\varphi = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$$

if $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$, $\varphi \geq 0$ in Ω with $\varphi = 0$ on $\partial\Omega$. The last equality formally follows from integration by parts and the fact that $|\nabla\varphi|$ agrees with inward normal derivative of φ on $\partial\Omega$. In section 2 we state these observations in a rigorous way allowing that $\nabla^2\varphi$ is a measure. If Ω is convex, the distance function d is concave in Ω so that $-\Delta d \geq 0$ in Ω (in the distribution sense). Thus

$$\int_{\Omega} |\Delta d| = \int_{\Omega} -\Delta d = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$$

so that d minimizes I as well as $\int_{\Omega} |\Delta\varphi|$. It turns out that d is a unique minimizer among all φ , $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$, $\varphi \geq 0$ in Ω with $\varphi = 0$ on $\partial\Omega$. The inequality

$$\int_{\Omega} |\Delta\varphi| \geq \int_{\Omega} -\Delta\varphi$$

is not sharp unless Ω is convex. In other words the minimum of I is strictly greater than $\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$ (Theorem 2.5.) The proof of (ii) depends on an explicit construction of the domain Ω .

As a corollary of (i) we get: if d is piecewise linear, more precisely, $\nabla^2 d = 0$ outside the

defect as a measure, then d also minimizes J^1 (among all nonnegative solutions of the eikonal equations) provided that the domain is convex. Note that such d exist if and only if the domain is a convex polygon as shown in Remark in §2.1.

Our counterexamples are interesting for the study of minimizers of singular perturbed variational problem

$$E_\varepsilon(\varphi) = \int_\Omega W(\nabla\varphi) + \varepsilon^2 \int_\Omega |\nabla^2\varphi|^2, \quad W(p) = (1 - |p|^2)^\sigma, \quad \sigma > 0$$

in a plane domain Ω with $\varphi = 0$ on $\partial\Omega$. Since the Euler-Lagrange equation is fourth order, we are entitled to impose another boundary condition. The natural choice seems to be $\partial u / \partial \nu = -1$, where ν is the unit outward normal of $\partial\Omega$. We divide E_ε by ε so that we hope that the energy has a nonzero limit as $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$.

Formal analysis for $\sigma = 2$ done by [AG1], [OG] suggests that this problem has Gamma-limit

$$\tilde{J} = 2 \int_\Sigma |\nabla\varphi^+ \cdot \nu - \nabla\varphi^- \cdot \nu| \int_{-b}^b |1 - (a^2 + \tau^2)|^{\sigma/2} d\tau d\mathcal{H}^{n-1}, \quad a = |(\nabla\varphi)_{\text{tan}}|, \quad b = (1 - a^2)^{1/2},$$

where $(\nabla\varphi)_{\text{tan}}$ denotes the tangential component of $\nabla\varphi^+$ (or $\nabla\varphi^-$). Since $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$, we see $\tilde{J}$ is a positive constant times $J^{\sigma+1}$. This $\tilde{J}$ (or $J^{\sigma+1}$) is to be minimized subject to the same boundary condition as for E_ε , and the interior condition $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$ a.e. in Ω .

It is tempting to think that the minimizer φ_ε of E_ε tends to

$$\varphi_0(x) = d(x, \partial\Omega).$$

as $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$. Similarly, it is tempting to think that this function might be a minimizer of $\tilde{J}$ (or $J^{\sigma+1}$). These conjectures are more or less explicit in [OG] (cf. [AG1] for $\sigma = 2$).

An extended version of our examples (Theorem 3.5) says that the second conjecture is false for some nonconvex domain at least for $\sigma < \beta_0 - 1$ with some $\beta_0 > 1$ close to one. Unfortunately in our examples β_0 is less than 3 so they do not solve the original conjecture for $\sigma = 2$. However, they are important because they show some possible pitfalls. In particular, they show that if these conjectures are true for $\sigma = 2$, then the reasons must be subtle since other equally

reasonable-sounding statements are false.

The limiting process of E_ε as $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$ is not at all clear compared with the case when $\nabla\varphi$ is a scalar function. Such a convergence problem is studied in [KM1], [KM2] for $\nabla\varphi$ when W has isolated equal minimums.

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2. ESTIMATE OF TOTAL VARIATIONS OF GRADIENT FIELD OF LENGTH ONE

We are concerned with total variation of $\nabla^2\psi$ in a bounded two dimensional domain Ω when $|\nabla\psi| = 1$, $\psi \geq 0$ on Ω and $\psi = 0$ on the boundary $\partial\Omega$. Our principal result in this section is that the minimum of the total variation is attained (uniquely) at the distance function provided that Ω is convex.

2.1. Notation. Let Ω be a bounded domain in $\mathbb{R}^n$ with Lipschitz boundary $\partial\Omega$. For a Lebesgue integrable function φ , i.e. $\varphi \in L^1(\Omega)$, let $\nabla\varphi = (\partial_i\varphi)_{i=1}^n$ and $\nabla^2\varphi = (\partial_i\partial_j\varphi)$ ($1 \leq i, j \leq n$) a distributional gradient and Hessian of φ , respectively. Let X be the space of $\varphi \in L^1(\Omega)$ such that $\partial_i\varphi \in L^1(\Omega)$ ($1 \leq i \leq n$) and $\partial_i\partial_j\varphi$ is a finite Radon measure on Ω ($1 \leq i, j \leq n$). In other words, $\partial_i\varphi$ is a function of (essentially) bounded variation, i.e. $\partial_i\varphi \in BV(\Omega)$. Let us recall fundamental decomposition of $\nabla^2\varphi$ for $\varphi \in X$; see e.g. [AG2]. Let Ω_0 be the largest subset in Ω such that $\nabla^2\varphi$ is absolutely continuous in Ω_0 and let Σ be the set of jump discontinuities of $\nabla\varphi$. Then

$$\nabla^2\varphi = \nabla^2\varphi|_{\Omega_0} + \nabla^2\varphi|_{(\Omega - \Omega_0 - \Sigma)} + \nu \otimes (\nabla\varphi^+ - \nabla\varphi^-)\mathcal{H}^{n-1}|_{\Sigma}.$$

Here for a set Z and measure μ we associate a new measure $\mu|Z$ by

$$(\mu|Z)(B) = \mu(Z \cap B), B \subset \Omega.$$

The vector field ν is the approximate unit normal of Σ and $\nabla\varphi^\pm$ is the trace of $\nabla\varphi$ on Σ in the direction of $\pm\nu$; $\mathcal{H}^k$ denotes the k -dimensional Hausdorff measure. The first term $(\nabla^2\varphi)^{ab} = \nabla^2\varphi|_{\Omega_0}$ is often called the *absolutely continuous* part of $\nabla^2\varphi$. We always identify $(\nabla^2\varphi)^{ab}$ with corresponding locally Lebesgue integrable function in Ω_0 . The second term is often called the *mild* part and it lies on a non rectifiable set $\Omega - \Omega_0 - \Sigma$ of Lebesgue measure zero. The sum of last two terms is called the *singular* part of $\nabla^2\varphi$. Let Y be the space of $\varphi \in X$ such that $\nabla\varphi$ has no absolute continuous part and no mild part. In other words

$$Y = \{\varphi \in X; \nabla^2\varphi = \nu \otimes (\nabla\varphi^+ - \nabla\varphi^-)\mathcal{H}^{n-1}|_{\Sigma}\}.$$

Let A be the space of $\varphi \in X$ such that $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$ a.e. in Ω with $\varphi = 0$ on $\partial\Omega$. We need three subclasses of A

$$A_+ = \{\varphi \in A; \varphi \geq 0 \text{ in } \Omega\}, \quad A^0 = A \cap Y, \quad A_+^0 = A_+ \cap A^0.$$

We consider two integrals for $\varphi \in X$ which measure jumps of $\nabla\varphi$.

$$I(\varphi) = \int_{\Omega} |\nabla^2\varphi|,$$

$$J^\beta(\varphi) = \int_{\Sigma} |\nabla\varphi^+ - \nabla\varphi^-|^\beta d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} \quad \text{for } \beta > 0.$$

Since $\nabla^2\varphi$ is a finite Radon measure, in the representation

$$\int_{\Omega} |\nabla^2\varphi| = \sup \left\{ \sum_{1 \leq i, j \leq n} \int_{\Omega} \theta_{ij} \partial_i \partial_j \varphi; \sum_{i, j} |\theta_{ij}|^2 \leq 1 \right\}$$

the test function θ_{ij} is allowed to be $\theta_{ij} \in C^1(\overline{\Omega})$ not necessarily compactly supported.

Remark. The set A_+^0 and even A^0 may be empty. In fact, A_+^0 (and A^0) is empty if $\partial\Omega$ has a 'curved' part. Conversely, A_+^0 is nonempty if Ω is a polygon. The proof is by the induction of

numbers of vertexes of Ω . If Ω is a triangle, the distance function d is certainly piecewise linear.

If Ω is a polygon of m (> 3) vertexes, we set

$$\rho(x, \partial\Omega) = \min\{d(x, L(S)); L(S) \text{ is a straight line containing an edge } S \text{ of } \partial\Omega\}$$

$$d_* = \inf\{\rho(x, \partial\Omega); \text{there is at least three edges } S_1, S_2, S_3 \text{ of } \partial\Omega$$

$$\text{such that } \rho(x, \partial\Omega) = d(x, L(S_i)), i = 1, 2, 3 \text{ and } x \in \Omega\}.$$

It is easy to see that ρ is piecewise linear in

$$\Omega_* = \{x \in \Omega, d(x) < d_*\}.$$

By the choice of d_* the set $K = \Omega - \Omega_*$ is a closed polygon with at most $m - 1$ vertexes; it may have no interior so that K is a set of points or segments. Let Ω' be the interior of K so that it is a polygon with at most $m - 1$ vertexes. By the induction the function $\rho(x, \partial\Omega')$ is piecewise linear in Ω' . Since

$$\rho(x, \partial\Omega) = \rho(x, \partial\Omega') + d_* \quad \text{in } \Omega',$$

and $\rho = \rho(x, \partial\Omega)$ is piecewise linear in Ω_* , we see ρ is piecewise linear in Ω . This shows that $\rho \in A_+^0$ so that A_+^0 is nonempty.

Note that ρ is the distance function d if and only if Ω is a convex polygon. If Ω is nonconvex, d is not piecewise linear, so $d \notin A_+^0$ if and only if Ω is a convex polygon.

We conclude this remark by pointing out that there is a domain Ω whose boundary is piecewise linear with infinite vertexes such that $\rho \in A_+^0$. For example if we consider

$$\Omega = \{(x, y); |x| < 1, 1 > y > h(x)\}$$

$$h(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{2^{\ell+1}} - |x - \frac{3}{2^{\ell+1}}| & \frac{1}{2^{\ell}} < x \leq \frac{1}{2^{\ell-1}}, \ell = 1, 2, \dots \\ 0 & x \leq 0 \end{cases}$$

then $\rho \in A_+^0$. See figure 1.

2.2. Comparison Lemma of Hessian and Laplacian measure. *Assume that $n = 2$. Then for $\varphi \in A$,*

$$|\Delta\varphi| = |\nabla^2\varphi| \quad (\text{as measures}).$$

This is formally true since $\nabla^2\varphi$ is rank one. Indeed, differentiating $|\nabla\varphi|^2 = 1$ yields

$$\sum_{j=1}^n (\partial_i \partial_j \varphi) \partial_j \varphi = 0.$$

We shall justify this observation for general Hessian measure $\nabla^2\varphi$ of $\varphi \in A$. We say that for $\varphi \in X$ the rank of matrix of the Radon-Nikodym derivative

$$F(x) = \lim_{r \downarrow 0} \nabla^2\varphi(B_r(x)) / |\nabla^2\varphi|(B_r(x))$$

is the rank of $\nabla^2\varphi$, where $B_r(x)$ denotes the closed ball of radius r centered at $x \in \Omega$. The rank of $\nabla\varphi$ is defined for $|\nabla^2\varphi|$ -almost every point x of Ω . Since $\nabla^2\varphi$ is absolutely continuous with respect to $|\nabla^2\varphi|$,

$$|\Delta\varphi|(Z) = \int_Z |\text{trace } F| d\mu, \quad |\nabla^2\varphi|(Z) = \int_Z |F| d\mu$$

with $\mu = |\nabla^2\varphi|$, where $|F|$ is the Hilbert-Schmidt norm of F , i.e., $|F|^2 = \sum_{ij} |F_{ij}|^2$. If F is rank 1, then

$$|\text{trace } F| = |F|$$

so that $|\Delta\varphi| = |\nabla^2\varphi|$. Lemma 2.2 rigorously follows from the following two lemmas.

Lemma [Al]. *If $\varphi \in X$, then the rank of the singular part of $\nabla^2\varphi$ (i.e. $\nabla^2\varphi - (\nabla^2\varphi)^{ab}$) is one.*

This is clear if $\varphi \in Y$ because of representation of $\nabla^2\varphi$. Such property was proved for an important subset of the singular part by the authors [AG2] and conjectured there for all singular part. This difficult problem was solved by Alberti [Al]. We do not need to assume $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$.

Lemma. *If $\varphi \in A$, then rank of the absolutely continuous part $(\nabla^2\varphi)^{ab}$ is less than or equal to $n - 1$.*

Proof. For $\varphi \in X$ and j , $1 \leq j \leq n$ there is a representative of $u = \nabla \varphi$ ($\mathcal{L}^n$ - a.e.) so that the pointwise derivative $\partial u / \partial x_j$ exists $\mathcal{L}^n$ -a.e. and

$$\frac{\partial u}{\partial x_j}(x) = (\partial_j \nabla \varphi)^{ab}(x) \quad \Omega_0 \quad (\mathcal{L}^n - \text{a.e.}) \quad (1 \leq j \leq n),$$

where $\mathcal{L}^n$ is the Lebesgues measure; see [AG3]. Note that the choice of u may depend on j .

Differentiating $|\nabla \varphi|^2 = 1$ in the j -th direction yields

$$\begin{aligned} 0 &= 2 \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{\partial u_i(x)}{\partial x_j} \cdot u_i(x) = 2 \sum_{i=1}^n (\partial_j (\partial_i \varphi))^{ab}(x) u_i(x) \\ &= 2 \sum_{i=1}^n (\partial_j (\partial_i \varphi)(x))^{ab} (\partial_i \varphi)(x) \quad \text{for } \mathcal{L}^n\text{-a.e. } x \in \Omega_0, \end{aligned}$$

where $u = (u_i)_{i=1}^n$. Since $|\nabla \varphi| \neq 0$ for a.e. x , this implies that $(\nabla^2 \varphi)^{ab}$ has a kernel for a.e. x so that rank of $(\nabla^2 \varphi)^{ab}$ is less than or equal to $n - 1$. $\square$

2.3. A key lemma. For $\varphi \in X$ assume that $|\nabla \varphi| = 1$ in Ω ($\mathcal{L}^n$ - a.e.) and $\varphi \geq 0$ in Ω with $\varphi = 0$ on $\partial\Omega$, i.e., $\varphi \in A_+$. Then

$$(-\Delta \varphi)(\Omega) = \int_{\Omega} -\Delta \varphi \geq \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega).$$

If $\varphi(x) = \text{dist}(x, \partial\Omega)$ near $\partial\Omega$, then the equality holds.

This is easy if φ is regular so that φ is a distance function $d(x, \partial\Omega)$ near $\partial\Omega$. Indeed, integrating by parts yields

$$\int_{\Omega} (-\Delta \varphi) d\mathcal{L}^n = - \int_{\partial\Omega} \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial \nu} d\mathcal{H}^{n-1},$$

where ν is the unit outward normal of $\partial\Omega$. Since $\varphi = 0$ on $\partial\Omega$ and $|\Delta \varphi| = 1$ so that $\nu = -\nabla \varphi / |\nabla \varphi|$, the derivative $-\partial \varphi / \partial \nu = 1$. Thus, the equality

$$\int_{\Omega} (-\Delta \varphi) d\mathcal{L}^n = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$$

is proved.

Proof. 1. For $\varphi \in X$ set

$$E_{\alpha} = \{x \in \Omega; \varphi(x) \geq \alpha\}, \alpha \geq 0.$$

Since $\varphi \geq 0$ near $\partial\Omega$, $\bigcup_{\alpha>0} E_\alpha = \Omega$ and E_α is decreasing in α . Since φ is continuous, E_α is closed for small $\alpha \geq 0$. Since $\Delta\varphi$ is a finite Radon measure in Ω , we obtain

$$\int_{\Omega} (-\Delta\varphi) = \lim_{\alpha \downarrow 0} \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta\varphi).$$

In particular

$$\int_{\Omega} (-\Delta\varphi) = \lim_{\varepsilon \downarrow 0} \frac{1}{\varepsilon} \int_0^\varepsilon d\alpha \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta\varphi).$$

2. We shall prove the identity

$$\int_0^\varepsilon d\alpha \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta\varphi) = \mathcal{L}^n(\Omega - E_\varepsilon) \quad \text{for small } \varepsilon > 0. \quad (2.1)$$

Let $\psi \in C^2(\Omega)$ with bounded gradient in Ω . Since φ is Lipschitz near $\partial\Omega$, the co-area formula [G, S] yields

$$\int_{\Omega - E_\varepsilon} \nabla\psi \cdot \nabla\varphi d\mathcal{L}^n = \int_0^\varepsilon d\alpha \int_{L_\alpha} (\nabla\psi, \frac{\nabla\varphi}{|\nabla\varphi|}) d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} \quad \text{with } L_\alpha = \{x \in \Omega; \varphi(x) = \alpha\}. \quad (2.2)$$

Since φ is differentiable and $|\nabla\varphi(x)| = 1$ for $\mathcal{L}^n$ -a.e. x (near $\partial\Omega$), by Fubini's theorem, for small $(\mathcal{L}^1)$ -a.e. $\alpha > 0$,

$$|\nabla\varphi(x_0)| = 1 \quad \text{for } \mathcal{H}^{n-1}\text{-a.e. } x_0 \text{ of } L_\alpha.$$

For such $\alpha > 0$ we may assume that the level set L_α is countably $n-1$ rectifiable so that at x_0 the approximate outer unit normal $\nu_\alpha(x_0) = -\nabla\varphi(x_0)$. We may also assume that E_α is a set of finite parameter so that the gradient $\nabla\chi_{E_\alpha}$ of the characteristic function χ_{E_α} of E_α is a finite Radon measure and that

$$\nabla\chi_{E_\alpha} = -\nu_\alpha \mathcal{H}^{n-1} \llcorner L_\alpha.$$

For these properties the reader is referred to the monographs [G, S]. For the above selected $\alpha > 0$ we observe that

$$\int_{L_\alpha} (\nabla\psi \cdot \frac{\nabla\varphi}{|\nabla\varphi|}) d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} = \int_{\Omega} \nabla\psi \cdot \nabla\chi_{E_\alpha} = \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta\psi) d\mathcal{L}^n$$

by integration by parts. This together with (2.2) yields

$$\int_{\Omega - E_\varepsilon} \nabla\psi \cdot \nabla\varphi d\mathcal{L}^n = \int_0^\varepsilon d\alpha \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta\psi) d\mathcal{L}^n. \quad (2.3)$$

We would like to take $\psi = \varphi$. Since φ is not C^2 , we need to approximate. Mollifying φ by a standard approximation as in [G, 1.17] we see that there is a sequence $\psi_j \in C^2(\Omega)$ such that

$$\begin{aligned} \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \int_{\Omega} |\nabla \psi_j - \nabla \varphi| d\mathcal{L}^n &= 0, \quad \sup_{j \geq 1} \sup_{\Omega} |\nabla \psi_j| < \infty \\ \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \int_{\Omega} |\Delta \psi_j| d\mathcal{L}^n &= \int_{\Omega} |\Delta \varphi| \end{aligned}$$

since $|\nabla \varphi|$ is bounded. In particular, $\nabla \psi_j \rightarrow \nabla \varphi$ for $\mathcal{L}^n$ -a.e. x by taking a subsequence if necessary. Moreover,

$$|\Delta \psi_j| \rightarrow |\Delta \varphi|, \quad \Delta \psi_j \rightarrow \Delta \varphi \quad \text{weakly as measures.}$$

We shall prove that $\int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta \varphi)$ is approximated by $\int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta \varphi_j) d\mathcal{L}^n$. Since $-\Delta \varphi$ is a nonnegative finite Radon measure and since L_{α_1} and L_{α_2} is disjoint for $\alpha_1 \neq \alpha_2$, we see

$$(-\Delta \varphi)(L_{\alpha'}) = 0$$

except at most countably many values of $\alpha' > 0$. For the above selected α

$$\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial E_\alpha - L_\alpha) = 0$$

since E_α is a set of finite perimeter [G].

Since $-\Delta \varphi$ is absolutely continuous with respect to $\mathcal{H}^{n-1}$ [G,S] we see

$$(-\Delta \varphi)(\partial E_\alpha - L_\alpha) = 0.$$

Since E_α is closed so that ∂E_α contains L_α , we may assume

$$(-\Delta \varphi)(\partial E_\alpha) = \int_{\partial E_\alpha} (-\Delta \varphi) = 0$$

for the above selected α by excluding the values of α' with $(-\Delta \varphi)(L_{\alpha'}) > 0$. We now apply [G, Appendix A1] to get

$$\lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta \psi_j) d\mathcal{L}^n = \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta \varphi).$$

Since $\sup_{\Omega} |\nabla \psi_j|$ is bounded and $\nabla \psi_j \rightarrow \nabla \psi$ a.e., we now obtain

$$\lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \int_{\Omega - E_\epsilon} (\nabla \psi_j \cdot \nabla \varphi) d\mathcal{L}^n = \int_{\Omega - E_\epsilon} |\nabla \varphi|^2 d\mathcal{L}^n = \mathcal{L}^n(\Omega - E_\epsilon).$$

Since

$$\sup_{\alpha, j} \int_{E_\alpha} |\Delta \psi_j|$$

is finite, the Lebesgue convergence theorem yields

$$\begin{aligned} \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \int_0^\varepsilon d\alpha \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta \psi_j) d\mathcal{L}^n &= \int_0^\varepsilon d\alpha \lim_{j \rightarrow \infty} \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta \psi_j) d\mathcal{L}^n \\ &= \int_0^\varepsilon d\alpha \int_{E_\alpha} (-\Delta \varphi). \end{aligned}$$

Plugging $\psi = \psi_j$ in (2.3) and letting $j \rightarrow \infty$ now yields (2.1).

3. Since $|\nabla \varphi| = 1$ in Ω , the set

$$\Omega - E_\varepsilon = \{x \in \Omega; 0 \leq \varphi(x) < \varepsilon\}$$

includes

$$F_\varepsilon = \{x \in \Omega; \text{dist}(x, \partial\Omega) < \varepsilon\}.$$

Since $\partial\Omega$ is Lipschitz, we see

$$\lim_{\varepsilon \downarrow 0} \mathcal{L}^n(F_\varepsilon)/\varepsilon = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega).$$

By step 1 and 2,

$$\int_\Omega (-\Delta \varphi) = \lim_{\varepsilon \downarrow 0} \mathcal{L}^n(\Omega - E_\varepsilon)/\varepsilon \geq \lim_{\varepsilon \downarrow 0} \mathcal{L}^n(F_\varepsilon)/\varepsilon = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega).$$

The equality holds when $\varphi(x) = d(x, \partial\Omega)$ near $\partial\Omega$. $\square$

2.4. Theorem on total variation of the Laplacian. *Let Ω be a bounded domain in $\mathbb{R}^n$ with Lipschitz boundary.*

(i) $\int_\Omega |\Delta \varphi| \geq \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$ for all $\varphi \in A_+$

(ii) If Ω is convex, the minimum of $\int_\Omega |\Delta \varphi|$ over A_+ is attained at $\varphi_0(x) = \text{dist}(x, \partial\Omega)$ and the minimal value is $\mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$.

Proof. (i) This is a direct consequence of Lemma 2.3.

(ii) If Ω is convex, then φ_0 is a concave function in Ω . This is easy; similar result is proved in

[C, p.53 Lemma]. In particular, $-\Delta\varphi = |\Delta\varphi|$ as a measure. Thus, Lemma 2.3 yields

$$-\int_{\Omega} \Delta\varphi_0 = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$$

so φ_0 is a minimizer of I over A_+ . $\square$

2.5. Theorem on total variation of the Hessian. *Let Ω be a bounded domain in R^n with Lipschitz boundary.*

- (i) $I(\varphi) = \int_{\Omega} |\nabla^2\varphi| dx \geq \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$ for all $\varphi \in A_+$ with $n \leq 2$ or for all $\varphi \in A_+^0$ for arbitrary n .
- (ii) If Ω is convex, the minimum of I over A_+ (with $n \leq 2$) or over A_+^0 is uniquely attained at $\varphi_0(x) = \text{dist}(x, \partial\Omega)$ and

$$I(\varphi_0) = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega).$$

- (iii) If Ω is not convex, $I(\varphi) > \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$ for all $\varphi \in A_+$, (with $n \leq 2$) or for all $\varphi \in A_+^0$.

Proof. (i) By Lemma 2.2 we see

$$|\Delta\varphi| = |\nabla^2\varphi| \quad \text{for } \varphi \in A \quad \text{with } n = 2;$$

this equality is also true for $\varphi \in A^0 = A \cap Y$ or for $\varphi \in A$ with $n = 1$, since $\nabla^2\varphi$ is rank one, Theorem 2.4 (i) now yields (i).

(ii) Since $|\Delta\varphi| = |\nabla^2\varphi|$, this follows from Theorem 2.4 (ii) except the uniqueness of the minimizer. Suppose that $I(\varphi) = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$, then

$$\int_{\Omega} |\nabla^2\varphi| = \int_{\Omega} |\Delta\varphi| = \int_{\Omega} -\Delta\varphi.$$

In particular $-\Delta\varphi \geq 0$ as a measure. Since $\nabla^2\varphi$ is rank 1, this means that φ is concave. A concave function φ in A_+ is a viscosity solution of $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$; see e.g. [L] so it is the distance function φ_0 .

(iii) If there is φ such that $I(\varphi) = \mathcal{H}^{n-1}(\partial\Omega)$, we see φ is a concave distance function φ_0 as in

(ii). However, such a distance function φ_0 is concave in Ω if and only if Ω is convex. Thus, the strict inequality holds for a nonconvex domain. $\square$

Remark. The uniqueness of minimizers of Theorem 2.4 (ii) would be true if $\varphi \in A_+$ satisfying $-\Delta\varphi \geq 0$ would be a viscosity solutions of $|\nabla\varphi| = 1$ (without assuming that φ is concave.) However, we do not attempt to discuss this problem here.

3. COUNTEREXAMPLE

We shall construct a simply connected but nonconvex domain Ω in $\mathbb{R}^2$ such that the distance function does not minimize neither J^1 nor I among the classes A, A_+, A^0, A_+^0 defined in § 2.2.

3.1. Choice of Domain. For a positive constant ℓ let D_ℓ be a square of the form

$$D_\ell = \{(x, y); |y| < \ell, 0 < x < 2\ell\}.$$

Let D be a unit square of the form

$$D = \{(x, y); |y| < 1/2, -1 < x < 0\}.$$

Let Ω_ℓ be the interior of the union of $\bar{D}$ and $\bar{D}_\ell$, where the bar denotes the closure. We shall always assume that $\ell > 1/2$. Clearly, Ω is a bounded simply connected but nonconvex domain.

3.2. Defects. We consider three solutions of the eikonal equation

$$|\nabla\varphi| = 1 \quad \text{in } \Omega_\ell \quad \text{with } \varphi = 0 \quad \text{on } \partial\Omega_\ell$$

of the form:

$$\begin{aligned} \varphi_0(x) &= \text{dist}(x, \partial\Omega_\ell) \\ \varphi_1(x) &= \begin{cases} -\text{dist}(x, \partial D) & \text{for } x \in \bar{D} \\ \text{dist}(x, \partial D_\ell) & \text{for } x \in \bar{D}_\ell \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

$$\varphi_2(x) = \begin{cases} \text{dist}(x, \partial D) & \text{for } x \in \bar{D} \\ \text{dist}(x, \partial D_\ell) & \text{for } x \in \bar{D}_\ell. \end{cases}$$

The set of jump discontinuities of $\nabla\varphi_1$ consists of

$$\begin{aligned} L_1 : y = \ell - x, 0 < x < 2\ell, & \quad L_2 : y = x - \ell, 0 < x < 2\ell \\ L_3 : y = -\frac{1}{2} - x, -1 < x < 0, & \quad L_4 : y = \frac{1}{2} + x, -1 < x < 0. \end{aligned}$$

The magnitude of jumps

$$j = |\nabla\varphi^+ - \nabla\varphi^-|$$

on each defects are $\sqrt{2}$. For later convenience we decompose defects of φ_1 :

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma_1^+ &= L_3 \cap R_1, & \Sigma_1^- &= L_4 \cap R_1 \\ S_1^+ &= L_4 \cap R_2, & S_1^- &= L_3 \cap R_2 \\ \Sigma_2^+ &= L_1 \cap R_3, & \Sigma_2^- &= L_2 \cap R_3 \\ S_2^+ &= L_1 \cap R_4, & S_2^- &= L_2 \cap R_4 \\ \Sigma_3^+ &= L_2 \cap R_5, & \Sigma_3^- &= L_1 \cap R_5 \end{aligned}$$

with

$$\begin{aligned} R_1 &= \{-1 < x < -1/2\}, & R_2 &= \{-1/2 < x < 0\} \\ R_3 &= \{0 < x < \ell - 1/2\}, & R_4 &= \{\ell - 1/2 < x < \ell\} \\ R_5 &= \{\ell < x < 2\ell\}. \end{aligned}$$

The defect of φ_0 consists of

$$\Sigma_i^\pm \quad i = 1, 2, 3 \quad \text{and}$$

$$\Gamma_1 = \{y = 0\} \cap R_2, \quad \Gamma_2 = \{y = 0\} \cap (R_3 \cup R_4),$$

$$\Gamma^+ = \{x^2 + (y - \frac{1}{2})^2 = (\ell - y)^2, y > 0\} \cap R_4$$

$$\Gamma^- = \{x^2 + (y + \frac{1}{2})^2 = (\ell + y)^2, y < 0\} \cap R_4.$$

see figure 2. The defect of φ_2 consists of $\Sigma_i^\pm$ ($i = 1, 2, 3$) $S_i^\pm$ ($i = 1, 2$) and

$$C = \{x = 0, |y| < 1/2\}$$

with jump $j = 2$ on C .

3.3. Computation of defect energy. We shall estimate the difference $J^\beta(\varphi_0) - J^\beta(\varphi_1)$. By symmetry with respect to $y = 0$ we observe that

$$\begin{aligned} J^\beta(\varphi_0) &= 2 \sum_{i=1}^3 J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Sigma_i^+) + \sum_{i=1}^2 J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_i) + 2J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma^+) \\ J^\beta(\varphi_1) &= 2 \sum_{i=1}^3 J^\beta(\varphi_1, \Sigma_i^+) + 2 \sum_{i=1}^2 J^\beta(\varphi_1, S_i^+) \end{aligned}$$

where

$$J^\beta(\varphi, B) = \int_{\Sigma \cap B} j^\beta d\mathcal{H}^{n-1} \quad \text{with } j = |\nabla \varphi^+ - \nabla \varphi^-|.$$

Since jump j is the same both for φ_0 and φ_1 on Σ_i^+ ,

$$J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Sigma_i^+) = J^\beta(\varphi_1, \Sigma_i^+) \quad i = 1, 2, 3.$$

Thus

$$J^\beta(\varphi_0) - J^\beta(\varphi_1) = \sum_{i=1}^2 J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_i) + 2J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma^+) - 2 \sum_{i=1}^2 J^\beta(\varphi_1, S_i^+).$$

Proposition. (i) $J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_1) = 2^{\beta-1}$.

(ii) $\lim_{\ell \rightarrow \infty} J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_2) = \int_0^\infty \frac{dx}{(x^2 + 1/4)^{\beta/2}} \geq \frac{1}{\beta-1} 2^{\beta-1}$ for $\beta > 1$.

For $\beta \leq 1$, $\lim_{\ell \rightarrow \infty} J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_2) = \infty$.

(iii) $J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma^+) \rightarrow 2^{(\beta-1)/2}$ as $\ell \rightarrow \infty$.

(iv) $J^\beta(\varphi_1, S_i^+) = 2^{(\beta-1)/2}$, $i = 1, 2$.

Proof. (i) Clearly, $j = 2$ on Γ_1 . Since the length of Γ_1 is $1/2$, $J^\beta = 2^{\beta-1}$.

(ii) Since the level curve of φ_0 intersecting $(x, 0)$ ($0 < x < \ell$) is the circle centered $(0, 1/2)$ for

$y > 0$, the normal component of $\nabla\varphi_0^+$ equals

$$\frac{1}{2} \frac{1}{(x^2 + 1/4)^{1/2}}.$$

Thus

$$J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_2) = \int_0^\ell \frac{dx}{(x^2 + 1/4)^{\beta/2}} \geq \int_0^\ell \frac{dx}{(x + 1/2)^\beta} = \frac{1}{\beta - 1} (x + \frac{1}{2})^{1-\beta} \Big|_0^\ell$$

and letting $\ell \rightarrow \infty$ completes the proof.

(iii) Recall that Γ^+ is a set of points whose distance to $(0, 1/2)$ equals the distance to the line $y = \ell$. The curve Γ^+ is a parabola given by

$$(2\ell - 1)y = -x^2 + \ell^2 - 1/4.$$

The jump

$$j(x) = 2 \frac{1}{(y'(x)^2 + 1)^{1/2}}$$

and the length element equals $(y'(x)^2 + 1)^{1/2} dx$. If p is the largest zero of $y(x)$, i.e.

$$p = (\ell^2 - 1/4)^{1/2},$$

then

$$J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma^+) = \int_{\ell-1/2}^p \left(2 \frac{1}{((y')^2 + 1)^{1/2}} \right)^\beta ((y')^2 + 1)^{1/2} dx.$$

Notice that

$$y'(x)^2 + 1 = \left(\frac{-2x}{2\ell - 1} \right)^2 + 1, \quad \ell - 1/2 < x < \ell$$

$$\rightarrow 2 \quad \text{as } \ell \rightarrow \infty$$

$$p - (\ell - 1/2) = (\ell^2 - 1/4)^{1/2} - (\ell - 1/2) = \frac{1}{2} + \frac{-2/4}{(\ell^2 - 1/4)^{1/2} + \ell}$$

$$\rightarrow \frac{1}{2} \quad \text{as } \ell \rightarrow \infty.$$

We thus conclude that

$$J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma^+) = \int_{\ell-1}^p 2^\beta ((y')^2 + 1)^{\frac{1-\beta}{2}} dx \rightarrow 2^\beta 2^{(1-\beta)/2} \cdot \frac{1}{2} = 2^{(\beta-1)/2} \quad \text{as } \ell \rightarrow \infty.$$

(iv) Since $j = \sqrt{2}$ and the length of S_i^+ equal $1/\sqrt{2}$, the result follows immediately. $\square$

3.4. Proposition. *Let Ω be the domain Ω_t defined in §3.1. Let φ_0 be the distance function of $\partial\Omega$ and let φ_1 and φ_2 be solutions of the eikonal equation defined in §3.2.*

- (i) $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} (J^\beta(\varphi_0) - J^\beta(\varphi_1)) = \infty$ for $0 < \beta \leq 1$.
- (ii) $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} (J^\beta(\varphi_0) - J^\beta(\varphi_2)) = \infty$ for $0 < \beta \leq 1$.
- (iii) $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} (J^\beta(\varphi_0) - J^\beta(\varphi_1)) > 0$ for all $\beta > 0$.
- (iv) $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} (J^\beta(\varphi_0) - J^\beta(\varphi_2)) > 0$ for all $0 < \beta < \beta_0$ with some $\beta_0 > 4/3$.

Proof. Applying the previous Proposition to the formula $J^\beta(\varphi_0) - J^\beta(\varphi_1)$ yields

$$\begin{aligned} T &= \lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} (J^\beta(\varphi_0) - J^\beta(\varphi_1)) = 2^{\beta-1} + \lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_2) + 2 \cdot 2^{(\beta-1)/2} \\ &\quad - 2(2^{(\beta-1)/2} + 2^{(\beta-1)/2}) \\ &= 2^{\beta-1} - 2 \cdot 2^{(\beta-1)/2} + \lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_2). \end{aligned}$$

If $\beta \leq 1$, then this formula yield (i). Note that

$$J^\beta(\varphi_2) = J^\beta(\varphi_1) + J^\beta(\varphi_2, C) \quad \text{with} \quad C = \bar{D} \cap \bar{D}_t.$$

Since $J^\beta(\varphi_2, C) = 1 \cdot 2^\beta$, the proof of (ii) is now complete.

To show (iii) we may assume $\beta > 1$ and use the estimate

$$\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} J^\beta(\varphi_0, \Gamma_2) \geq \frac{1}{\beta-1} 2^{\beta-1}.$$

to get

$$T \geq 2 \cdot 2^{(\beta-1)/2} (f(\beta) - 1)$$

with $f(\beta) = 2^{(\beta-3)/2} \frac{\beta}{\beta-1}$. An elementary calculation shows that f takes the only minimum at $\beta = \beta_1$ over all $\beta > 0$. The number β_1 is the solution of

$$-\frac{1}{\beta_1-1} + \frac{1}{2}(\log 2)\beta_1 = 0 \quad \text{so that} \quad \beta_1 \geq 1.$$

Since $\log 2 > 1/2$, $(\beta_1 - 1)\beta_1 \leq 1/4$ so that $\beta_1 - 1 \leq 1/2$. Since $\beta_1 \geq 1$ we now obtain

$$\begin{aligned} f(\beta) &\geq f(\beta_1) = 2^{(\beta_1-3)/2} \left(1 + \frac{1}{\beta_1 - 1}\right) \\ &> 2^{-1}(1 + 2). \end{aligned}$$

We thus conclude

$$J^\beta(\varphi_0) > J^\beta(\varphi_1) + 2 \cdot 2^{(\beta-1)/2} \cdot 1/2.$$

It remains to prove (iv). We may assume $\beta > 1$. Notice that $J^\beta(\varphi_2, C) = 2^\beta$ to get

$$\begin{aligned} T &\geq \frac{\beta}{\beta-1} 2^{\beta-1} - 2 \cdot 2^{(\beta-1)/2} - 2^\beta \\ &= 2 \cdot 2^{(\beta-1)/2} \left(\left(\frac{1}{\beta-1} - 1 \right) 2^{(\beta-3)/2} - 1 \right). \end{aligned}$$

The right hand side is positive if $\beta \leq 4/3$. $\square$

3.5. Theorem. Assume that $\Omega = \Omega_\ell$.

(i) ($\beta \leq 1$) For each $M > 0$, there is a constant $\ell_0 = \ell_0(\beta)$ such that if $\ell > \ell_0(\beta)$ then

$$J^\beta(\varphi_0) \geq J^\beta(\varphi_2) + M \geq J^\beta(\varphi_1) + M.$$

Moreover, φ_0 does not minimize neither I nor J^β in A_+ , A .

(ii) ($\beta > 1$) There is a constant $\ell_1 = \ell_1(\beta)$ such that φ_0 does not minimize J^β in A for $\ell > \ell_1(\beta)$. Moreover, if $\beta \leq 4/3$ (or $\beta < \beta_0$), then φ_0 does not minimize J^β in A_+ .

Proof. (i) The first inequality follows from Proposition 3.4 (ii) and

$$J^\beta(\varphi_2) = J^\beta(\varphi_1) + 2^\beta$$

for sufficiently large ℓ . Since $\varphi_0 \in A_+ \subset A$, $\varphi_1 \in A^0$ and $\varphi_2 \in A_+^0$, we now observe that

$$I(\varphi_0) \geq J^1(\varphi_0) > I(\varphi_2) = J^1(\varphi_2) > I(\varphi_1) = J^1(\varphi_1).$$

and

$$J^\beta(\varphi_0) > J^\beta(\varphi_2) > J^\beta(\varphi_1) \quad \text{for } \beta \leq 1.$$

(ii) Since $\varphi_0 \in A_+$, $\varphi_1 \in A^0$ and $\varphi_2 \in A_+^0$, Proposition 3.4 yields the desired conclusion. $\square$

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Figure 1

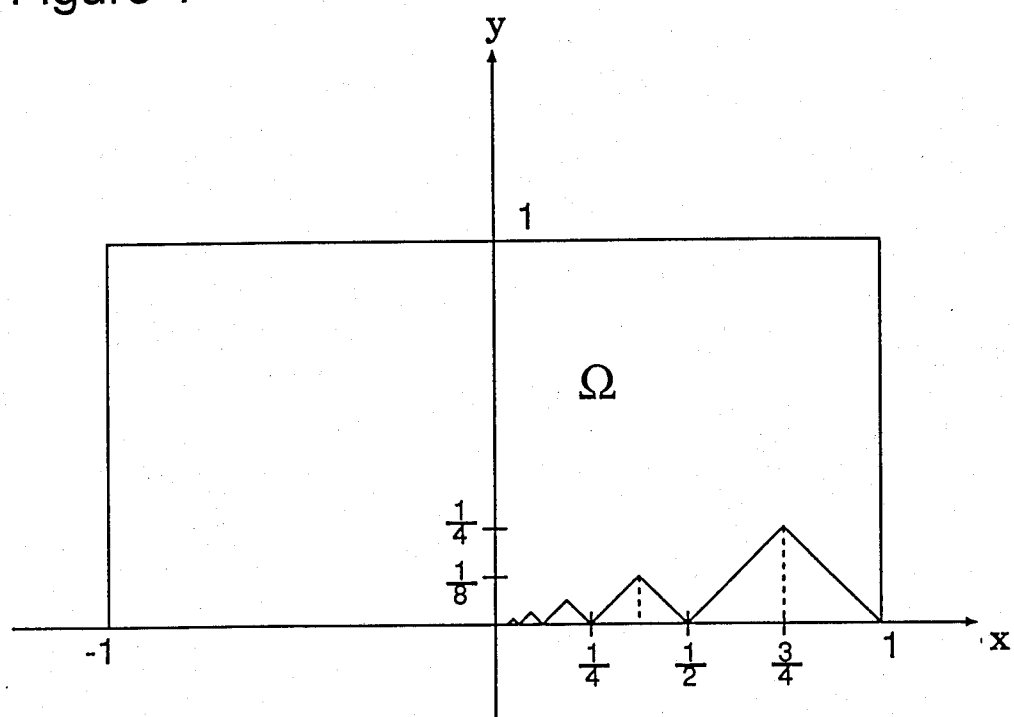
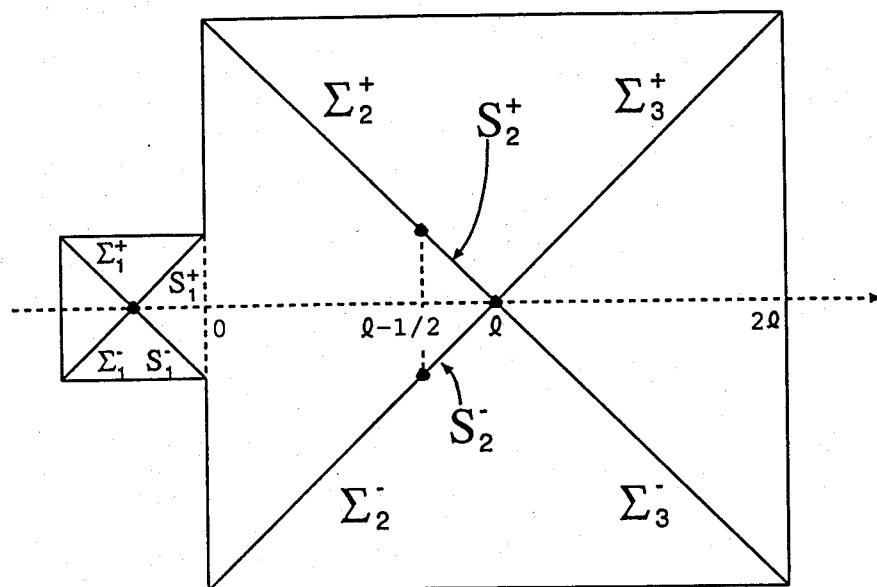
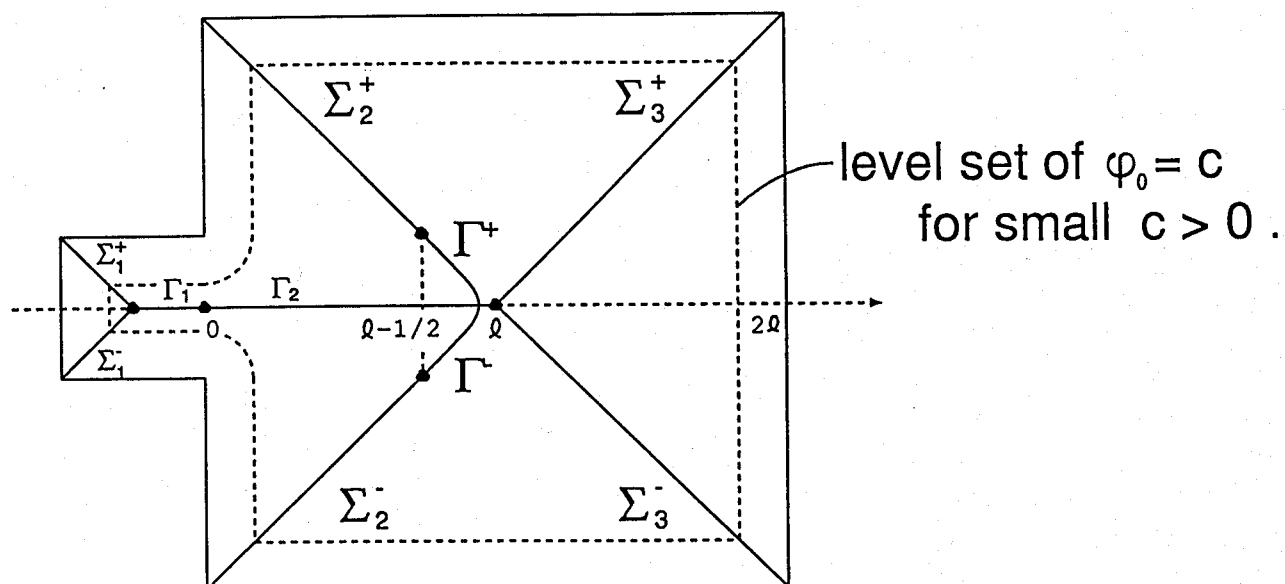


Figure 2



defects of φ_1



defects of φ_0